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INFO RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 8057
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RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA 9419
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S E C R E T BOGOTA 007383

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [CO](#)
SUBJECT: COLOMBIA SECURITY UPDATE - Q2'06

REF: A. BOGOTA 3814

[1](#)B. BOGOTA 5497

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood
Reasons: 1.4(a), (b), (d)

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Police and military operations at least temporarily pushed the FARC -- and many of its senior leaders -- out of the eastern side of the Macarena Park. Fighting on the western side continued. Police and the COLMIL deterred significant attacks during the presidential elections. FARC actions were mostly limited to small-scale attacks on soft targets, avoiding direct engagement with the COLAR. For the first time the COLAR killed a member of the FARC's General Staff. The ELN leadership appeared to have weaker control over its units in the field. Some demobilized ex-paramilitaries re-formed into new criminal groups. End Summary.

Plan Patriota: FARC Thwarted

[1](#)2. (S) The pre-election concentration of FARC forces noted in the first quarter on the Sumapaz plateau (ref A) appeared to have dissipated, apparently deterred by six COLAR battalions from their plans to re-enter Cundinamarca department. Farther south, in La Uribe and Julia, west of La Macarena park, commanders of Joint Task Force Omega (JTF-O, the lead unit executing Plan Patriota) believed the FARC aimed to establish an intermediate rear guard for a Cundinamarca offensive. FARC military chief alias 'Mono Jojoy' was thought to have been in the area and to have dispersed with those troops.

[1](#)3. (S) JTF-O commanders believed the FARC would engage in near-term escalation of hostilities before entering negotiations. In their view, the FARC, much debilitated, had already concluded it could not withstand another four years of military pressure under President Uribe. In this scenario, the terrorists would execute attacks to gain bargaining leverage in negotiations. Aside from the aborted Sumapaz plan, signs indicating offensive FARC intent were movements into territory vacated by demobilized paramilitaries, efforts to rebuild urban militia networks,

and reported attempts to purchase a handful of shoulder-launched surface-to-air missiles (MANPADs).

¶4. (C) Meanwhile, during the quarter FARC actions remained mostly limited to small-scale, risk-averse attacks on undefended civilians or infrastructure, or ambushes of isolated COLAR elements such as those guarding manual coca eradicators in La Macarena National Park. Against the COLAR, the FARC continued to avoid direct engagement. Two fronts where the FARC fought more aggressively were against ex-AUC in Narino/Cauca (for narcotrafficking) and against the ELN in Arauca (for the drug trade, pipeline extortion, and other income sources).

¶5. (C) An important milestone was achieved in June with the first combat takedown of a member of the FARC's General Staff. A 25-year veteran of the insurgency, 'Juan Carlos,' was subcommander of the FARC's Middle Magdalena Bloc which was charged with retaking ex-paramilitary territory. Juan Carlos' killing was a morale boost to the COLAR in its (thus far unsuccessful) effort to take down high value targets (HVTs).

FARC: More Terrorism, Less Conventional?

¶6. (C) The second quarter repeated the first in terms of FARC soft targets: unarmed civilians (several more councilors assassinated, and Bogota buses bombed), electrical towers and oil pipelines, and isolated COLAR units (another 12 soldiers killed by ambush while guarding coca eradicators). In the first quarter, the COLAR seized 20 tons of ANFO (ammonium nitrate fuel oil) explosive from the FARC. Like explosives, increased use of land mines by the FARC reflected their preference for weapons that put them at a safe distance from their targets. The COLMIL was actively clearing mines from military installations, but the FARC was planting more to defend coca fields from manual eradication and to increase casualty rates among soldiers.

¶7. (S) The COLMIL suspended offensive operations to provide security for the May 28 elections, which were statistically the least violent in 20 years. It is unclear to what degree this was due to COLMIL and police countermeasures, FARC doubts about their ability to make an impact, or the public relations cost of attacking voters at the polls: probably it was a combination of the three. Operational weakness was accompanied by rare disunity among leaders: sensitive sources say military chief 'Mono Jojoy' was ordering attacks while Reyes was calling for a halt. A brief kidnap of 16 poll officials in Choco, released the same day, may reflect conflicting orders.

ELN: Collapsing and Cleaving

¶8. (C) COLMIL figures indicate that only 20 ELN units executed actions in the first half of this year. Most activity was in the Pacific coast departments of Narino, Cauca, Valle, and Choco, or in the east (Norte de Santander, Casanare, and Arauca). Due to takedowns of mid-level commanders, the ELN was said to be suffering from a lack of qualified commanders and from low morale.

¶9. (S) FARC-ELN relations were at odds in Arauca, where the FARC publicly "declared war" on the ELN in June, largely as a result of turf battles associated with the drug trade. The FARC killed dozens of ELN members this year, along with an EFL-affiliated council president in Arauquita. However, ELN fronts in other areas, particularly Narino and Choco, worked closely with the FARC on narcotrafficking. This suggests the ELN leadership does not fully control its troops.